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AUTHOR Harf, James E.
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ABSTRACT

Education about national security has always been part of the social studies curriculum in U.S. high schools. But its focus has been simply chronological and episodic with major attention given to war, particularly the decision to enter it and the conduct of U.S. military forces. Little attention has been given to the evolution and structural arrangements of this nation's security, the underlying global and national premises for maintaining security, and the basic context in which security has been achieved. This ERIC digest treats (1) the meaning of national security, (2) the rationale for including it in the curriculum, (3) entry points for its inclusion, (4) the challenges to such education, and (5) the criteria for education about national security. A 14-item bibliography is included. (GEA)

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National Security in the Curriculum

James E. Harf

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2805 East Tenth Street, Suite 120
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana 47405 (812) 855-3838

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NATIONAL SECURITY IN THE CURRICULUM

by James E. Harf

Education about national security has always been part of the social studies curriculum in America's high schools. But its focus has been simply chronological and episodic with major attention given to war, particularly the decision to enter it and the conduct of U.S. military forces. Little attention has been given to the evolution and structural arrangements of this nation's security, the underlying global and national premises for maintaining security, and the basic context in which security has been achieved. This ERIC Digest treats (1) the meaning of national security, (2) the rationale for including it in the curriculum, (3) the place for its inclusion, (4) the challenges to such education, and (5) the criteria for education about national security.

What Is National Security? For scholars and policy-makers national security has at least two levels of commonly accepted meaning. First, in its most basic sense national security means protection of a nation's borders and territories against invasion or control by foreign powers. In a world where the nation-state remains the basic unit having principal control of physical force, such protection is so important that no other goals can be realized without it.

Second, this broader view of national security involves the promotion of national values, interests, and institutions and the protection of them from various threats. Today, political events in seemingly remote parts of the world and various kinds of problems (monetary instability, world-wide inflation and unemployment, ecology disturbances, etc.) can directly affect a nation's well-being.

The appearance of nuclear weapons has greatly complicated the meaning and the pursuit of national security. With the advent of the nuclear age in 1945, the question of national security became closely linked with nuclear weapons. These new weapons were able to threaten not only other nations but the survival of the planet itself, forevermore linking national well-being to international security.

Why Teach About National Security? Several points justify education about national security. First, education about national security has an important and distinct contribution to make to education for competent citizenship, the prime mission of social studies education. There can be no more vital requirement for good citizenship in the nuclear age than an ability to understand and participate competently in public policy processes related to national security, for many of the most crucial public policy issues involve the latter domain.

Social studies educators have always recognized their special obligation for citizen preparation, and increasingly many are aware of the need for strengthening education relevant to national security and related issues. A recent national survey of state social studies supervisors found nearly unanimous agreement that "teachers should confront nuclear issues and help students examine possible consequences of alternatives." (Hahn 1985, 249).

A second reason for systematic attention to national security is the widespread support for bringing global perspectives to the education of American youth. Literature on global education indicates a number of essential elements of global education, including questions of peace and security. National security specialists are especially concerned about the peace and security aspects of global education.

Where Can National Security Be Included in the Curriculum? The topic of national security should be included throughout the curriculum, because subject matter pertains to every major section of core social studies courses. Throughout each of the existing major social studies courses—American government, American history, economics, world geography, world history—there are multiple entry points where the content, skills, and values associated with security are especially relevant and therefore may be introduced. Teachers of American history, for example, can use the debates of the Constitutional Convention and the discourses of *The Federalist* papers to focus on the initial structural arrangements for and the problems of seeking national security. Students can be taught that George Washington's Farewell Address set the foundation for American security policy well into the 20th century. Many topics, such as post-World War II arms control efforts, can be related to national security.

What Are Challenges to National Security Education? While educators are receptive to efforts to strengthen instruction about national security, they face significant challenges in doing so.

A Crowded Curriculum. Today's secondary schools have too much to teach in too little time and there is limited room to accommodate an additional focus on national security topics.

Educators' Limited Background. Social studies educators have little or no formal training regarding national security and related studies and no ready access to such information for instructional purposes, curriculum planning, and materials development.

Inadequate Instructional Materials. Major social studies textbooks give little systematic attention to security and are flawed by superficiality, poor pedagogy, and a bias toward particular political causes or special interests.

Scholars' Training and Experience. Despite the best of intentions, the contributions of university scholars who become involved in curriculum development, teacher training, or related tasks may be limited by a lack of skill and experience with pre-collegiate education as well as a lack of interest in such collaboration.

James E. Harf is a Professor of Political Science, The Ohio State University.

What Are Guidelines for Implementation of National Security Education? While it is important that explicit criteria exist to guide every educational experience, it is especially useful for a subject about which there is public controversy. Controversial issues must be presented in a manner relevant to the subject matter of the course being taught, appropriate to the age and maturity level of the student, and regarded as important and not disruptive. Moreover, multiple perspectives must be provided without politicizing the situation, exploiting emotional trauma, or promoting feelings of alienation or despair.

The following additional criteria are based on experiences in national security education at the Mershon Center of The Ohio State University.

- The school board should officially recognize the legitimacy of education about national security and provide general guidelines and support for implementing plans designed by the district's professional educators.
- School administrators should understand the dimensions of education about national security topics and be involved in the implementation of plans for their inclusion in the curriculum.
- The goals for education about national security must be consistent with and reinforce the goals of the existing social studies curriculum.
- The content must be grounded in a conceptual foundation extracted from the body of theory and research in the scholarly field of national security studies.
- Teaching strategies and materials must present information about national security in a balanced manner that does not advocate any particular point of view.
- The addressing of student fears should represent an instrumental goal in the pursuit of understanding of the subject matter and the ability to analyze the issues.

References and ERIC Resources

The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are in the ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) system and are available in microfiche and or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, write EDRS, 1900 Wheeler Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22304 or call 800-227-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number are annotated monthly in CIJE (*Current Index to Journals in Education)*, which is available in most libraries. EJ documents are not available through EDRS; however, they can be located in the journal section of most libraries by using bibliographic information provided below.

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